



## **The Carrots Are Cooked: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard**

Gideon Bachmann; Jean-Luc Godard

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a blow to the face with the butt end of a rifle wielded by an Indonesian officer (who actually seems to be saving Guy's life by not shooting him on the spot).

After being treated for a serious injury to one eye, Guy decides to risk a mad dash to the airport to join Gillian on a flight out of the country. In a harrowing ride past military convoys carrying out roadside executions, Guy and his Indonesian assistant are finally waved through one last military roadblock and succeed in reaching the airport. As Guy tells his assistant to take the car and head for the mountains to avoid the purge of communists, this dedicated, low-ranking *cadre* looks Guy calmly in the face and declares simply that "In the end, we will win. We believe in something."

It is a moving line; and, in the long run, it is a fairly persuasive line. One is left with the impression that although the right-wing military may succeed in setting back the communist movement for years, or even decades, it will never eradicate a movement which is sustained by such a sincere and determined quest for social justice on the part of Indonesia's impoverished masses. By contrast, Guy Hamilton's decision to flee the country by joining Gillian on the last flight out seems

not only a trite ending but also an example of the ultimate fall-back position of even the sympathetic westerner, who, when the going gets rough, can always make a fast exit.

In this respect—and in spite of the romantic mush of the film's final shot of Gillian embracing Guy with open arms as he boards the plane—the downbeat ending of *The Year of Living Dangerously* strikes me as far more realistic (that is to say, more politically lucid) than the upbeat ending of *Under Fire*, in which the two American journalists offer themselves a self-congratulatory moment ("I'd do it all again") for having successfully aided the revolution. It's not that I am pessimistic about the chances for successful revolution (in Nicaragua, Indonesia, or elsewhere). It's just that I am doubtful, to say the least, that such revolutions will be made possible by heroic choices made by *gringo* journalists. Such notions of individual heroism may be the conventional stuff of Hollywood films (including *Under Fire*), but, whatever other failings *The Year of Living Dangerously* may have, this film at least spares us *Under Fire*'s naïve and arrogant vision of Third World revolution made possible through the courtesy of individual western journalists.

GIDEON BACHMANN

# The Carrots Are Cooked

## A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard

When Jean-Luc Godard received the grand prize at last year's Venice Film Festival from a jury composed largely of directors of his generation, it was widely felt that it was an award for his stubbornness in trying to renew the language of cinema with each *sortie* and perhaps an acknowledgement of past contributions to it. I don't remember a single critic who at the time thought *Prénom: Carmen* was a masterpiece in itself.

The film utilizes the syntax invented for

*Sauve qui peut: la vie*, but more linear than *Passion*; we are dealing now with disappointment. The coordinates of Working Class Crust and Is Art Life? are there as before, but the graph Godard dances in their field of interaction is nothing so much as the balancing act of a miser reluctant to eschew engagement in favor of a defeatist rationale. *Prénom: Carmen* is ambivalence on the level of art.

The intentions seem clear, on the face of it. Godard shows the struggle of the sexes in a more modern and perhaps sadder way than Bizet did in shaping his romantic musical ver-

sion of the book by Prosper Mérimée. We are in modern France where a gang of youths are about to rob a bank and stage a kidnapping under the guise of a low-budget film-making enterprise. Carmen (Maruschka Detmers) is the mascot of the gang and she enlists her uncle (Godard himself), a former film director now living in an asylum, to help by providing a mantle of respectability and a location (a mythical villa he is supposed to possess), but who in fact contributes nothing but epithets. Don José (Jacques Bonaffé) is a cop who grabs her at the bank but the grab becomes sexual there on the marble slats, et cetera, et cetera—except that once she's got him she won't have him again. Click: the male of the eighties.

The attempt to find out how far one can go in breaking down the traditional ways of making films here carries Godard to self-imposed extremes: he says, for example, that he can use only two sound tracks because he has only two hands. So when the two tracks are taken up by music and the sound of waves, there is no track for dialogue and the actors mouth their lines in silence. And mixing is against his grain, too, so sounds (including musical cadences) stop and start in the middle. Not to speak of the disconnectedness of images long his trademark.



*Any particular comment on the title, Prenom: Carmen?*

In the film there is a question: "What is there before the name?" People always want to know what things are called. Do things always have to be called by a name? Maybe the things just come to us without being called by a specific name. I think that the cinema should show things before they receive a name, so that they can be given a name, or that we can give in to the business of naming them.

Today we live in an epoch of total power being given to all forms of rhetoric, a time of terrorism of language which is further accentuated by television. I, as a modest employee of the cinema, have an interest to speak of things before words and names take over, to speak of the child before daddy and mummy give it a name. To speak of myself before I hear myself being called Jean-Luc. To speak of the sea, of liberty,

before they are being called sea, waves or freedom.

Carmen is a great feminine myth which exists only through music, and I can well understand that quite a few film directors in this epoch might feel that they want to make a film of it. Maybe in this moment the media feel a need to take over this myth, maybe it's the time for the last struggle between women and men or maybe the time for the first struggle of women against men.

I like dealing with things that may soon no longer exist or dealing with things which do not exist yet. Thus the real title of the film could be *Before the name*. Before language, in other words, *Before Language* (*Children playing Carmen*).

*Why Beethoven?*

I didn't choose Beethoven, it's Beethoven, in a way, who chose me. I followed the call. When I was 20 myself, which is the age of the characters in my film, I had listened to Beethoven at the seashore, in Brittany, the last Quartets, and discovered the Quartets there. Now, Hamlet or Electra can exist without music, but not Carmen. Thus music is part of the history of Carmen; in fact, the book by Mérimée was never famous until it was made famous through Bizet's putting it to music. Bizet was a composer whose music Nietzsche called "brown," but which is the music of the Mediterranean, since he was a composer of the south, very much connected to the sea. So I did not only pick a different music but also a different sea.

I preferred the ocean to the Mediterranean, and what I wanted was to have what I would call "fundamental" music. I wanted music which had marked the history of music itself, both its practice and theory, and the Beethoven Quartets represent this. I could have chosen Bach, something like *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*, music which stands for all the theory and all the practice of music which has so far existed, and which gives work to all the musicians of past and present throughout history. In fact, in my next film, I will use Bach.

About the title, I wanted to add that I feel that everybody knows the story of Carmen but nobody knows what really happened between Don José and Carmen or between Joseph and Carmen nor how it actually went:

people know how it started and they know how it will end, but not how to get from the beginning to the end, and that's what this means, the telling of stories: to show how it went.

The big difference with the Carmen films made by Rosi or Saura is that theirs are illustrations of a classic theme, whereas we tried to find what a man and a woman have said to each other, dominated by that image of love which weighs upon them, the name which is given to their love or to their adventure from the beginning, things like "destiny" or "love" or "curse." If they are in a kitchen, what did they say? If they are in a car, what did they say? Nobody knows.

In my next film, I shall keep the same characters, they will be called Joseph and Maria, and it will concern what Joseph and Maria said to each other before having a child. So you could say this one is just a preparation for my next film. My films always announce the next one. Of course I try not to announce catastrophes . . .

*You played a role in your film this time . . .*

Yes, to amuse myself, and in order to see if one really amuses oneself being an actor. I have always had relations with actors which are at the same time very tender and very violent. The same as with my technicians. And for once I wanted to see myself from the front and not from the back.

I was also doing it because I want to prepare myself to play the principal part in a film, something like Harry Langdon did or a bit like Jerry Lewis, whom, as you know, I greatly admire.

For once I didn't want only my spirit to work but my body as well, and my voice. I thought that it would be a good idea, for technical reasons, to play upon my name, something that was not totally me although it was also me, so that one could believe to some extent the thing one sees. Like the musicians, whom you actually see in the film, so the one who invents the story is also part of the story.

*You mean normal actors can not be believed easily?*

I always let the actors do absolutely all the things they want to, I just put them into certain conditions. Normally they think these conditions are easy but often they discover



*Marushka in PRENOM: CARMEN*

[Photos from the screen: GIDEON BACHMANN]

that they are quite hard, and they have to save themselves. If they have said to me that they can swim I try to throw them in the sea and see how they swim. That's all my work with actors.

*Love in the Cinema . . .*

Love in the cinema or love of the cinema . . . In military films it's the love of young men for guns, and in gangster films it's the love of young men for stealing; and in the cinema that's the achievement of the Nouvelle Vague, of Truffaut and Rivette and myself and a few others: to have brought back to the cinema something that had gone out of it, namely the love of the cinema itself. We loved cinema before loving women, before loving money, before loving war. It's the cinema that made me discover life and it took me 30 years, in fact, because I had to get through all those things which I myself projected on the screen . . . but without love, there is no film.

And if cinema today still works on television, it's because television itself has no love.

*Television substitutes what?*

On television you can find power in its pure state, and the only things that people like seeing on TV at all are sports and cinema films, and that is because they seek love and they have learned that they need to go towards the screen in order to go towards others. And of course in modern life we do not manage to go towards others, and thus we have learned to accept the fact that we are somewhat impotent—we are not powerful, potent like the men of the military or the scientists or the television people themselves that one sees on television—we are somewhat impotent.

In fact, we admit that we are impotent. On the other hand, we have it, the good intention to move out, to go forward, to project, to touch others. And the others, on their side,

put in a lot of good intentions as well to come and meet us. There is the goodwill for a meeting: that's the cinema. The cinema is the love, the meeting, the love of ourselves and of life, the love of ourselves on earth, it's a very evangelical matter, and it's not by chance that the white screen is like a canvas. In my next film I want to use it in this way, the screen as the linen of Veronique, the shroud that keeps the trace, the love, of the lived, of the world.

There is no film without love, love of some kind. There can be novels without love, other works of art without love, but there can be no cinema without love.

*So you cannot do it alone? Cannot be an "author"?*

I find it useless to keep offering the public the "auteur." In Venice, when I got the prize of the Golden Lion I said that I probably deserve only the mane of this lion, and maybe the tail. Everything in the middle should go to all the others who work on a picture: the paws to the director of photography, the face to the editor, the body to the actors. I don't believe in the solitude of an artist and the auteur with a capital A. The American cinema wouldn't exist today if it hadn't been for great producers like Irving Thalberg [whose entire method was based on delegating pre-planned scripts to directors to make.—G.B.] In general, there is a tendency today to consider the problems of the director without thinking that behind him there are many other figures equally important in the making of the film.

*The sound engineers, for example? You pay ever more attention to sound now.*

I have always paid considerable attention to the sound track; I think we were among the first to use direct sound. I stopped going to Italian films, in fact, when I found out, by filming in Italy, that nobody there recorded the sound at all and they make it all up later. Mind you, there is a great musical tradition in Italy, which makes it all even more ridiculous. I don't think there should be a conflict between the sound and the image. That's why there is the sea in my film and the music, and the music is part of the action and I planned it so it should be part of the action and that it should not at all be like in the film that Saura made of Carmen, a literary pretext to show that the musicians are playing . . . if the

musicians should stop playing I would have no more ideas.

If you take *Alexander Nevsky* by Eisenstein, for example, the battle scenes, these were first written in the form of a score by Prokofiev and this gave Eisenstein ideas; he had the score changed and then they shot the scenes in accordance with the music they had worked on together. My film has much less ambition but three quarters of the scenes in my film were also made in this way. For example, the attack on the bank came to be after I heard a certain part of the 10th Quartet and I understood, since I was planning this film, in which there was to be a crime element, I understood that Carmen could in fact be part of a small gang and so then came the idea that Don José is a policeman and in this way we came back to the real story of Carmen.

The music has a certain control over the images, and there are places in the film where the scenes become a bit autonomous or simplistic or even vulgar, like in a few of the love scenes between the protagonists, and then the music comes and takes over as if it were saying, "Come on, let's go, let's go on, this is serious . . ."

Everybody knows this, it has been said again and again, and not only about Carmen, music announces the events ["la musique annonce les evenements"], it presages history, as it were, and even people like Mitterand's advisers know this, and if the politicians would only listen to the music of the people, they might know better what goes on.

So I don't think that what I am doing with sound is new, I think I have always paid as much attention to it and given it great importance. I find myself, in fact, being quite original in what I do, and maybe alone.

For example, all my films since *Sauve qui peut* have only two mixing tracks. You know, in the cinema, when it comes to making up the final sound track, there are always many original tapes—the sound of a car arriving at the beach, for example, the voices of the actors getting out of it and saying "I love you" or the opposite, the sound of the waves behind them, maybe a cock crowing in a nearby farm, and some music. That makes five tracks . . . and I have only two hands to manipulate them . . . if I had only one arm, maybe I'd have only a single sound

track. All this business of having the various sounds marching up in front of you like soldiers is called mixing and I can only control it with the two hands I have. I don't mind putting a cock on the track if we are in a farm but all these sounds—there isn't the space . . . so I prefer to work very carefully on the sound and put in only that which is the important sound of the moment.

*We all have only two hands . . .*

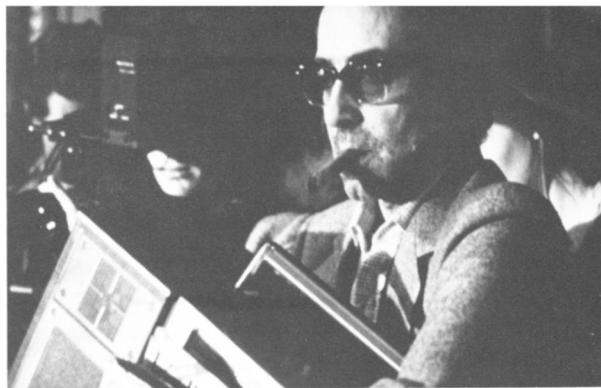
Exactly. Take Rodin, the sculptor. In the planning stage of *Prénom: Carmen*, we had love scenes, which in the end did not become real love scenes in the film, and we wanted to make them like certain Rodin sculptures. In the end the actors didn't like the idea and we didn't do it like that, but we continued to call the love scenes "the Rodin scenes." And then when I did the cutting of the film and the sound editing and mixing, the idea I had had of Rodin was the same idea: the sculptor works with two hands against a surface, he carves space, and since musicians are always speaking of audible space I think that the thing I'd like to lead them to do is to carve this audible space.

And in filming the ones who execute the music, I was striving for a physical feeling of music, especially with the violin, where I really had the feeling of carving. So this is how connections arise and you say to yourself, "After the view of a violin which is carving what is the image to show next?" Obviously the image of a sea which does the same, carving with waves and crevasses, highs and lows, and as long as you are dealing with highs and lows you say, "Well, there are two people there who will have moments of high and low feeling," and this is how it all hangs together, completely logically, that's the cinema. There is nothing invented in the cinema.

All you can do in the cinema is observe and try and put in order that which one has seen if one has been able to see well.

*Is that what you have tried to do in your cinema always?*

"Always" is a big word; I have no "style," I just want to make films. If I have influenced young film-makers, who are a bit like my children or my brothers or who may have been my parents before I started, the only influence that I cared for was to show them that to make a film was a possible thing. It is not



*Godard as Uncle Jean who inhabits the lunatic asylum in PRENOM: CARMEN*

true that only if you have a great deal of money can you make a film. If you have a lot of money it is just a different kind of film that you will make. If you have no money, you can still make a film . . .

*What is your position then, as a film-maker?*

It is a position in the margin. But that is normal. No book can exist without a margin, and whether I watch a tennis or a football match, I am always in the margin, in relation to the players, that is, I am in the place of the public, of the onlookers. In fact, to be in the margin, that is the real position of the public. It is a necessary position. That which is seen cannot be seen without those who see it.

As far as technique is concerned, I am beginning to understand my position fairly clearly in front of the overall power of television . . . I am sure that in 20 years I wouldn't even have the right to a position as a sweeper in the RAI studios [Italian Television.—G.B.], even that they would refuse me. So I must either try and save myself or try to collaborate with others who are also trying to save themselves. It could be the Palestinians, and although I may not need to go and see them I can at least listen to what they have to say; or it could be a musician, or it could be Picasso, or an unknown person, and I am beginning to understand the drama that it must have been for certain great film directors when sound and color came, like Keaton, who succumbed, or like Chaplin, who took time to succumb, or when others rose in their stead.

Cinema has always been a great popular art, and that is the idea upon which the History of Cinema will be based which I am now preparing for the Fourth Channel of French Television—to show that there were unusual cultural forces at work here, since they were

and are unique to the cinema: this immediacy of mass distribution.

Painting had never known this, Mozart was played for the princes, it wasn't like it could have been today, where every morning millions could listen to Mozart. Beethoven was heard only by a few in his time, Goya was seen by even less. But the cinema—even in the Grand Café of Lumière it was seen by 100 people at once, and today, too, it is seen everywhere, at once. There was and is something profoundly popular in the cinema, whether you are seeking this effect or not.

Mostly this is the result of monetary considerations, but this isn't the only cause. *Birth of a Nation* by Griffith was made for money, but Griffith had other aims besides, and these aims were democratically distributed. And don't forget that sound came to the cinema in the depression, the word arrived on the screen in times of unemployment, in the time that Roosevelt came to power, and in the time when Hitler was beginning to take over in Germany.

When I say "the word" I do not mean the "real" word, the word of philosophers or lovers, but I mean the words of those in power, the same ones who today are installed or, rather, those who today have installed themselves behind the technique of television, causing the decline of the images. There are no more images today. As Jean-Pierre Gorin used to say in the time we worked together: "Films are no longer seen, they are read."

For this reason it is not as interesting as it could be to participate in many round-table discussions or conferences, even with people of good will and good intentions, because these are all discussions without the object: it's like parents wishing their children well and discussing, in the child's absence, what the child might most wish to have, without asking the child if it prefers a bicycle or chocolate or a bank account. Nobody today really knows or listens to those in the margin, the viewers.

"Video" means "I see," but what is happening is that with the complicity of the masses video becomes the medium of those who do not want to see.

*And the position of your technicians?*

I have always been very well supported and aided by my technicians. I am a person who

likes to receive; the camera, for example, for me cannot be a rifle, since it is not an instrument that sends out but an instrument that receives. And it receives with the aid of light. That's why I say that the photography in my films is made by three people, three factors: me, who says, that's how we will shoot it; Coutard, my cameraman, second, who accepts to do what I ask him to; and, in the third place, an old friend from long ago, Kodak. Coutard is a man who accepts to work without artificial light and still makes his work interesting. He accepts to see that a light that comes in from behind a curtain is not the same thing as a light that comes in through a door and he tries to understand this and to reflect upon it. And he agrees to consider together with us whether this is a light that should be reconstructed or a light that ought to be left as it is. And Kodak is preferable to Fuji, and this is why I have put it in the credits of this film.

I think the Japanese are right in their claim for Fuji film when they say that it makes Africa reinvent its colors, because in effect what we are doing in the cinema and on television is shoot everything on the level of white or on the level of grey, because it is all done in relation to the white skin and not in relation to the slightly dull skin color of the Japanese or the slightly yellowish skin color of the Eskimos, or the black skin of the blacks.

In fact, black and white are the most difficult colors. And it is difficult to convince them in the laboratories to even try, because they are dominated by what television demands, which is an image which has lighting but no light.

In my films there is always very little lighting; in fact Isabelle Adjani, who was supposed to make this film with me, was frightened by this fact, she thought she wasn't pretty enough or wouldn't be in this film, and we agreed to disagree and I made the film with Marushka Detmers. Adjani thought, like all stars, that a lot of lighting, a lot of spots, is a guarantee for their appearing beautifully on the screen. She could not accept that daylight, slightly corrected, could be a much better guarantee for her beauty.

That's why I had all this difficulty, and why without Raoul Coutard I couldn't have made the film, because I mixed daylight with artifi-

cial light and only he agreed to do this. Thus we have in some shots a warm light on one side and a cold light on the other; you could say this is an ultra-classic film, after all, Carmen blows hot and cold . . . it is a film which is constantly between hot and cold, and the images express what is happening in the emotions.

*For the cinema, your final words in the film, "This is called dawn," could well be changed to "This is called dusk" . . .*

It is true that for the cinema I have a sentiment of dusk, but isn't that the time when the most beautiful walks are taken? In the evening, when the night falls and there is the hope for tomorrow? Lovers rarely ever walk about hand in hand at seven o'clock in the morning . . . for me, dusk is a notion of hope rather than of despair.

There is something, however, that I am beginning to find very beautiful in the cinema, something very human which gives me the desire to continue working in it until I die, and that is precisely that I say to myself that the cinema and myself may die at the same time . . . and when I say "cinema" I mean cinema as it was invented. In other words, cinema, which deals in human gestures and actions (unlike painting or music and dance) in their reproduction, can probably only last, such as it was invented, for the duration of a human life. Something between 80 and 120 years . . .

This means that it is true that the cinema is a passing thing, something ephemeral, something that goes by . . . of course, today

they are trying to stock them on cassettes, but the more videocassettes you buy, the less time you have to watch them . . . so it seems that collecting cassettes means something else, it's a form of stockpiling provisions, not a form of eating one's provisions. Some kind of safeguard for the future.

So I now accept that cinema is ephemeral. It is true that at times I felt differently, that I lamented the future, that I said "What will become of us?" or "How terrible," but now I see that I have lived this period of cinema very fully.

*You mean you are happy it's over?*

It may not be, but one period of it is. My parents lived its first period; they didn't tell me about it; I had to discover it myself with the help of people like Langlois and some others, in museums, but I have lived my own period fully, my road is marked, I will last this precise time.

I already see the new times, such as they are, and I have always been interested in the new; television . . . anyway, soon there will be no more images on television but only text . . . it has already begun . . . you will no longer see an image of carrots which you can buy in a supermarket and the price you may have to pay, because it would take a Flaherty or a Rouch or a Godard to film them, and if they took me I would get interested in the cashier and I'd start to tell a story. . . but you will just be told in words, "The carrots are cooked." That is the cinema of tomorrow and already that of today. For me, this is quite a gay conclusion.

SCOTT MacDONALD

## Cinema 16: An Interview with Amos Vogel

Amos Vogel's impact on North American film awareness is impossible to measure. In 1946, with the help of his wife Marsha, he founded what soon became, with 7,000 members, one of the most successful and influential film societies in American history: Cinema

16. For seventeen years he supplied New Yorkers with regular screenings of dramatic features, social and political documentaries, avant-garde work, animation, scientific films . . . every interesting, challenging form of film he could find, some 1,000 films in all. To